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Teacher Education for Social Justice: Case studies of Japanese and Norwegian educators

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Abstract

As a counter-reaction to the neoliberal trend in education, there has been an increasing emphasis on teacher education for social justice. To make schools inclusive for everyone, it is vital to encourage not only minority and/or marginalised pupils but also to develop respect for diversity and a disposition to social justice among powerful majority groups. Thus, teachers need to be capable of cultivating classrooms as inclusive and culturally sensitive learning communities. The role of teachers as agents of social justice can be considered an extension of professionalism that should be addressed in initial teacher education. Arguing for different approaches to educate justice-oriented teachers, this paper scrutinises how educators' beliefs are reflected in their practices and what curricula and teaching approaches are employed to help student teachers prepare for culturally diverse classrooms. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's conceptualisation of justice, this paper examines narratives of teacher educators and their curricula using a framework of three concepts of justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation. In order to make suggestions for effective teacher education for social justice in a society where cultural diversity has not been well recognised until recently, we examine experiences from teacher educators who prepare their students to teach English in Japan and Norway.

Keywords: teacher education, social justice, theory of justice

Introduction

During recent decades, a neoconservative and neoliberal trend focused on individualism, private property, and free markets has influenced large segments of educational policy, including teacher education (Sleeter 2017). As a counter-reaction to this trend, teacher education for social justice is one of the themes on which emphasis is increasing (Nieto 2000; Cochran-Smith 2015; Sleeter 2017). Some researchers focus on the various aspects of social justice, such as rules, norms, and attitudes, while others refer to behaviours at different levels such as individual, group, and nation (Moore 2003). Although they vary in their focus, there is a consensus that teacher education for social justice seeks to achieve socially just teaching. In addition, Achinsten and Ogawa (2006) pointed out that teachers would find it difficult to reflect their own professional principles to their practices to engage in the transformation of structural injustices when they are seen as 'resisting' under control-oriented educational policies. It suggests that fostering teachers as agents of social justice should be promoted throughout their professional career, beginning from initial teacher education.

To make schools inclusive for everyone it is vital to not only encourage minority and/or marginalised pupils, but also to develop respect for diversity and a disposition towards social justice within powerful majority groups. Thus, teachers need to be able to cultivate classrooms that are inclusive and culturally sensitive learning communities. This role of teachers as agents of social justice can be considered an extension of professionalism that needs to be addressed in initial teacher education (Pantić & Florian 2015). Whilst scholars have paid greater attention to the ways to challenge whiteness and related beliefs among teachers (Galman, et al. 2010), the quality of teaching in diverse classrooms has not been well studied. Arguing for different approaches for educating justice-oriented teachers, this paper scrutinises how educators' beliefs are reflected in their practices and what curricula and teaching approaches are employed to help student teachers prepare for culturally diverse classrooms. We examine narratives from teacher educators and draw on conceptualisations of justice developed by Nancy Fraser, namely redistribution, recognition, and representation. In order to make suggestions for effective teacher education for social justice in a society where cultural diversity has only recently been well recognised, we examine beliefs and practices related to fairness and social justice among teacher educators who prepare their students to teach English in Japan and Norway.

Setting the Scene: Demographical changes, immigration, and education

Despite their indigenous populations and histories of migration from neighbour countries, both Japan and Norway held an image of themselves as a homogeneous country until recent years (Oguma 2002; Eriksen 2012). Rapid increases in immigration became more visible due to the influx of new migrants from South-East Asia to Japan in 1980s, and to the new 'visible' immigrants from Turkey and Pakistan to Norway in 1960s. Japan just changed its famously restrictive immigration policy to open its doors to unskilled foreign workers in April 2019. Areas where high concentrations of immigrants have led to the implementation of integration policies at local levels, however, the Japanese government has not yet introduced any comprehensive integration policies, including policies on education, at a national level. With regard to integration policy in schools, Norway shifted from a strong assimilationist education policy to one of integration in the 2000s. A 2004 white paper described Norwegian society as being open to change and introduced a more inclusive model of what it means to be a Norwegian (Ministry of Local Government and Modernization 2004).

English and English Education

English is learned as a compulsory second language in both of these countries, and inevitably involves intercultural and communicative aspects. In Japan, English is often used by politicians and the media as a synonym for an international outlook or internationalisation (Seargeant 2009). For students, English is one of the key subjects they need to be accepted to good high schools and universities, and English gives them an advantage in the job market. Therefore, English in school curriculum and education policy has a significant status in Japan's meritocratic social systems (Ushioda 2013). In Norway, large portions of post-graduate education is offered in English, and as a global language it is often necessary in workplaces as well. Therefore, it has a special status over other languages, but English fluency is no longer 'special' because almost everyone from the younger generations is proficient in English (Bøhn 2015).

English will become a compulsory subject for fifth and sixth year students from 2020 in Japan. 'English Activities', which focuses on verbal communication, have been implemented during the transition period of 2018 and 2019. According to the official Course of Study, the purpose of English education in elementary schools is to focus on developing communication skills and promote understanding of different cultures. In Norway, English is a compulsory subject from the first year of elementary education. Students normally reach upper-intermediate level (CEFR B1/B2) by the time they enter upper secondary schools at age 16 (Bøhn 2015). The Norwegian national curriculum defines the purpose of English education as the development of communicative and linguistic skills and cultural competencies and stipulates these skills as the basis for democratic citizenship (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2013).

Theoretical Framework

In the following sections, we examine theoretical studies of social justice in the contexts of education and teacher education.

Social Justice Conceptions

Chubbuck and Zembylas (2016) state that Nancy Fraser's idea of social justice could be useful for teacher education because it provides the basic framework to develop discussions and because it helps deeper understanding of the tensions and conflicts between different forms of (in)justice. Fraser (2009) argues that an ideal definition of social justice is impossible and thus the experience of injustice forms the concept of justice. She focusses on the three dimensions of (in)justice, namely *redistribution*, *recognition*, and *representation*.

Redistribution The aspect of redistribution focusses on issues related to the unequal distribution of resources, rights, and opportunities (Fraser 1997). A socially just society is impeded by economic structures that include the distribution of resources, economic marginalisation, and deprivation. These economic injustices lead to social fragmentation and prevent people from interacting with each other. The goals of teacher education would be to recognise, interrogate, and challenge the structures that maintain inequitable distribution of resources at various levels, including the classroom, school, and society.

Recognition Even if a redistribution policy helps marginalised groups of children, who are often excluded from education, to attend school, they would still face various rigid biases and stereotypes and could be regarded as objects of threat or inferior, i.e. as 'different.' In teacher education, the dimension of (mis)recognition clearly aligns with theories of multiculturalism. By listening to the voices of those students labelled as 'others', the teachers-to-be become aware that our perceptions are founded on a false bias. When students' voices, histories, faces, and norms are omitted from teaching and learning, misrecognition is evident in depreciation through silencing. Their inclusion encourages the non-disenfranchised students to recognise 'others', including the silenced ones.

Representation The premise of this aspect is that all people have a political voice and should participate as equals in decisions that influence them. Misrepresentation in the political process may lead to injustice, and the people who are disadvantaged by unjust policies are not able to remedy them. In an educational context, unjust policies occur in testing, accountability, and international comparisons (Chubbuck & Zembylas 2016).

In another example, Silverman (2010), after examining pre-service teachers' perceptions and practices, argues that growth in the inclusiveness of curriculum and practices could be stifled by teachers' beliefs about 'diversity' that lead them to limit inclusion to some groups that are included and participating.

Social Justice and Teacher Education

Social Justice and Teacher Education

Almost one-third of the teachers rated their development need in the area of 'teaching special learning needs students' as high in the first Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD 2010). It indicates that many teachers feel they are not fully prepared to teach in a classroom with children with diverse needs and that teacher education plays an important role to help meet such teachers' needs with social justice as a key focus. The goal of teacher education for social justice is to prepare teachers to promote students' learning and thereby enhance their capabilities and life chances. According to Cochran-Smith (2010), it includes 'the challenges to the hegemony of the knowledge base and the curricular canon, rich and real learning opportunities for all students, outcomes for students that include true preparation for participation in a diverse democratic society, and the roles for teachers as activists as well as educators' (Cochran-Smith 2010: 462). Research reviews on social justice-oriented teacher education provide recommendations for the development of teacher candidates' *dispositions* and *pedagogy* to help them become socially just teachers, although they suggest that more empirical studies need to be conducted (Chubbuck & Zembylas 2016; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2010). Here we examine these recommendations drawing from Nancy Fraser's dimensions of social justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation.

Development of student teachers' *dispositions* and interpretive frameworks is important as they directly influence the way they teach. This can be a painful process for those from the dominant group because they are often unaware of their institutionalised privileges. Since student teachers tend to 'showed little understanding of institutionalized racism, maintained significant deficit views of students of colour, and believed in individualistic meritocracy' (Chubbuck & Zembylas 2016: 479), they can experience major challenges in trying to address redistributive and recognitional justice. Socially just teachers see their students as individuals, and they also see them as members of sociocultural groups who experience structural privilege or disadvantage. These teachers also use a structural interpretive framework rather than an individualistic/meritocratic interpretive framework because the latter does not allow teachers to understand students' experiences and see institutional inequality critically.

Pedagogy, curriculum, and advocacy in socially just teaching are organised into the elements of *culturally relevant pedagogy*, which has four goals: academic excellence, cultural competence, critical analysis, and activism (Chubbuck & Zembylas 2016: 485-486). Socially just practice without supporting the students' acquisition of advanced skills and knowledge does not really function as a just practice, therefore, academic excellence is a vital element for socially just pedagogy in terms of redistributive justice. As for recognitional justice, cultural competence is an important element that is often based on constructivist pedagogy. This includes instruction built on students'/communities' knowledge, norms, and communicative practices. Curriculum contents based on student's life as well as pedagogy, incorporating the student's home language,

are encouraged. Pedagogy that promotes students' multiple perspectives, critical analysis, and discussions on social structures as well as controversial issues are key elements for empowering students to function for representational justice.

Teacher educators play an important role in teacher education as they model the role of teachers (Korthagen et al. 2005). They do not only provide knowledge and other support for student teachers' learning, but they also teach about teaching. Therefore, we focus on the views and practices of teacher educators because their knowledge, understandings and commitments have significant influences on outcomes of teacher education.

Teacher Educators' Discourses

Methodology

In order to examine how teacher education can help student teachers to develop their capacities as agents for social justice, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with teacher educators who are involved in initial teacher education with personal interests in social justice. As individual initiatives for social justice in teacher education can be a sensitive topic, particularly in the Japanese context, we used personal networks in order to collect in-depth data in a relaxed atmosphere in which interviewees can feel comfortable when they talk about their own beliefs and experiences. Therefore, we analyse the collected data not to generalise, but to explore possibilities and challenges for educating teachers as agents for social justice by examining teacher educators' personal beliefs, practices, and struggles.

Then we selected four interview data of those who are specialised in English education, two from each country. The interview data was audio recorded and transcribed in full. We analysed the transcripts focusing on how interviewees address the power of hegemonic mainstream groups and challenge prerequisite notions of culture and identity of the majority and minority. We first examined the focus group data by country by categorising paragraphs into meaning units, then conducted an intensive analysis of two interview transcripts, comparing them with the categories identified from the first analysis. Name of interviewees are pseudonym. Curriculum and related documents were also analysed to examine the findings from the interviews.

Finding 1 – Japanese Instructors

During the interview, Masumi and Yae stressed the importance of English classes in providing opportunities to understand 'others'. In Japanese society, Japanese speakers constitute the majority, and students tend to assume that 'non-Japanese speakers are 'others' who are completely different from us'. Matsumi and Yae believe English has the potential for addressing recognitional injustice. This is because Japanese people regard English as a tool for communicating with 'others'. There are two examples of addressing this recognitional injustice: *recognizing and reconstructing stereotypes and bias; and deepening self-understanding*.

Recognising and Reconstructing the Stereotypes and Bias

Understanding others also involves recognising and reconstructing stereotypes and biases. During the

interview, both Yae and Masumi mentioned stereotypes and biases among students as a major problem.

Students in English education consider international students as tools for speaking English (...). They want international students to become their partner during their English training. Thus, for them, Swahili-speaking people are useless because they need an English-speaking person for practice.

Because students in English education just focus on practicing English, they disregard the cultural backgrounds of foreign students. Yae helps students overcome this bias and respect the cultural backgrounds of international students. Masumi also stressed that 'language education can provide an opportunity to convey to the students that languages and cultures are not superior or inferior'. This is connected to the awareness regarding cultural imperialism related to English, which is an important factor in recognitional injustice. Yae added:

In a word, I think that students of English Education can do anything if they can speak English because English is regarded as *lingua franca*. That is correct in a sense, but it's not all.

When Yae questioned the dominance of English, she met people who are passionate about learning Japanese because it would provide them job opportunities. She felt English education could be a tool for spreading English supremacy.

To help Japanese students to understand their bias, Yae conducted collaborative activities involving both Japanese and international students, which promote mutual understanding and respect. Such activities also promote cultural understanding and help students recognise 'others'. This could also give them an opportunity to understand distributive injustice perceived by people associated with certain languages and cultures.

Deepening Self-Understanding

To recognise stereotypes and bias among students, Yae would like students to consider English speakers as individuals rather than as people from certain countries or speakers of certain languages. By doing so, English student teachers can build relationships with foreign students despite cultural and language barriers, and also develop self-understanding.

In the English course, classes of cross-cultural understanding tend to focus on the differences between nations, such as England and the United States. Rather, I think individual understanding is more important and thus it takes more time to understand the importance. Of course, there is a difference between Japan and China, but I also explain that there are various layers even in Japan. For example, depending on gender, regional, and generational differences, even Japanese people cannot communicate with other Japanese even though they speak same language. Meanwhile, if you are a lesbian, you say that it might be a great match with someone from a completely different in country, language, and generation.

If students are aware that even their own personalities have various aspects, they are able to understand themselves more deeply, and also recognise 'others'.

Yae and Masumi also mentioned that English student teachers tend to have a richer international experience than teachers from other subject areas such as Japanese, social studies, and science, and they use this experience as a resource while teaching. They also encourage student teachers to reflect on their own international experience and to empathise with international students based on their own experiences as students. Masumi explained that:

There are larger number of students in the English department who have already experienced different cultures. Some are returnees, and the others have been to foreign countries as exchange students. (...) such students tend to accept inclusive perspectives that embrace the diversity of other children by reflecting on their experience.

Recognising Linguistic Minorities among Learners

Yae points out that student teachers seem to believe in the premise that everyone is pleased to learn English because they enjoy learning it and believe in its superiority. She would like student teachers to understand the pupils who have different perceptions regarding learning English because those pupils may be experiencing distributive injustice. Thus, after conducting multi-linguistic activities, she asked the students to reflect on their own feelings:

'You cannot understand Arabic at all, right? How do you feel?' I ask my students. And after that, I refer to the elementary students who study English for the first time. I say, 'Your current feeling is similar to that of elementary students (who hear English for the first time).' Then, the students say or feel, 'Oh, now, I see!'

She also questions student teachers assumption that they are going to teach only Japanese students, even though there are a number of non-Japanese speaking pupils in Japanese schools. This means that knowing that students are experiencing a distributive injustice situation can help recognize them and make them feel like the members of the class. This means that the three aspects of injustice—redistribution, recognition, and representation—are mutually connected in teacher education practice.

Findings 2 – Norwegian Instructors

Recognising Linguistic Diversity of Learners

[I am] trying to raise our students' awareness that they're not just English teachers teaching pupils who have Norwegian as their native language, but they're teaching pupils that have a lot of diversity in their language portfolio.

Sigrid, who is a native Norwegian, emphasised how important it is to recognise the diversity of pupils' linguistic backgrounds. Dana, who was raised in the former Yugoslavia, pointed out that student teachers

tend to assume that they are going to teach English to Norwegian-speaking pupils. She also realised that even textbooks take it for granted:

When I started teaching here in 2011, most textbooks (...) keep comparing English to Norwegian (...). For me, coming from sort of a broader theoretical linguistic background, it was interesting that it's narrowed, just contrasting it with Norwegian, and especially when you look at the statistics that there's many schools, many classrooms, where most of the pupils don't have Norwegian as their native language.

The way Dana refers to redistributive justice means that those whose native language is not Norwegian might be disadvantaged if English lessons or textbooks are developed merely for Norwegian speakers. It also relates to recognitional justice, to raise the awareness of linguistic diversity within a classroom for student teachers, which is often overlooked by textbook companies.

Diversity as a Resource

Both Dana and Sigrid mentioned how they use students' mother tongues as resources for learning. Dana said she collected information such as the linguistic backgrounds and any learning difficulties of her students to make sure she can accommodate them, and she often refers to students' language backgrounds during her class. For instance, she gave examples from Turkish and Chinese, languages spoken by some of her students, when she explained sound systems.

When I meet new students, I collect various types of information from them, sort of out of anything like learning difficulties, colour blindness, so that we can adapt our PowerPoints (...) one of the things I collect is their language background, so any other native languages, languages they've named or anything like them, I try to bring in.

Sigrid also referred to students' language as a resource rather than taking a deficit view:

Many of my colleagues are interested in (...) the importance of recognising other people's culture and languages and to recognise the resources they had within language education (...) rather than seeing that as a problem that you speak another language at home and that English might be your third or fourth or fifth language.

Their views on learners' linguistic diversity as a resource are a challenge not only to recognitional injustice, which ignores such diversity, but also to distributional injustice, which sees minority language and culture as a deficit rather than cultural capital.

Challenging the Nateness of English

Both Dana and Sigrid questioned the dominant perception of native accents, where those speakers with

British or American accents tend to be considered as having 'native' English pronunciation. Quoting Dana:

For example, in pronunciation, when we talk about accents and what's described as the non-native accents of English (...) whether it's always a bad thing to not have a native-sounding accent, because there might be some people for whom it's an important part of their identity to sound like (...) where they come from.

According to Fraser (1997), recognitional injustice refers to cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect. These attitudes refer to cultural imperialism, which is associated with universalisation of the culture of a dominant group. Therefore, teaching pupils that a British or American accent is 'right' or 'authentic' may imply that other accents are non-authentic or wrong. It also raises a question, related to representative justice, about whether English speakers with, for example, Norwegian accents can be considered 'English speakers.' Regarding English literatures, Sigrid mentioned the underrepresentation of female and minority backgrounds: 'We actually looked (curriculum) a bit at maybe we have too many male authors, so we tried to have authors with different backgrounds'.

Conceptions of Culture

During the interview, Sigrid stressed the importance of critical and constructionist perspectives on concepts of culture:

We look at different definitions of culture. We talk about what is Norwegian culture to you, or whatever. (...) talk about culture as dynamic, that it's not static and we are influenced from other culture....I think for analytic purposes that is useful to look at culture as products, practices, and perspectives. It can help them understand how their cultural perspectives influence their practices and as such.

She believes that everyone believes in certain stereotypes and it is important to help students be aware of this in order to avoid stereotyping and generalising, saying, 'I always found it important to help students understand that, for example, just because you're Christian or just because you're a Muslim, it doesn't mean that you have all those convictions'. Whilst stressing stereotypes, she also believes that one might need to simplify some aspects of different cultures to understand and gain basic knowledge. 'It finds balance between sort of simplifying, making culture comprehensible and at the same time avoiding stereotypes but considering how if you experienced a conflict due to cultural differences'. Regarding critical learning about culture, Sigrid recalled that two Norwegian female students in her class expressed their feelings:

I remember one in particular saying, 'I'm so sick that we have to adapt Norwegian culture to the cultures who come to our country and it's always us doing something wrong. And all this talk about how we need to change. (...) So, we had this discussion a lot. (...) they didn't want their values being challenged. And they were like, 'I'm proud to be a Norwegian and I don't want anyone to come and

tell me that anything'. Really strong.

This story suggests that some students, particularly those of dominant groups, may experience a disturbance when they learn about recognitional justice which challenges their values or perceptions.

Discussion

In the analysis of both Japanese and Norwegian data, more than one concept of justice is often identified in each component of the teacher educator's discourses on social justice. This supports the arguments made by Young (1990) and Honneth (2003) that the three concepts of justice are not independent and need to be understood as interrelated and interconnected. There was no implicit conflict between different concepts of justice identified in this study, but there were some tensions in relation to recognitional justice. In the case of Norway, a teacher educator mentioned that some Norwegian students found themselves disturbed when their perceptions or values were challenged. Chubbuck and Zempylas (2016) described the development of socially just teachers' dispositions as a 'painful process' for those from majority groups, so teacher educators might need to prepare for negative reactions or confusion from these students when they suggest a critical approach to a dominant perspective.

When compared to the Norwegian data, Japanese instructors indicated that they employed implicit approaches when they challenged majority perspectives to 'change it to some extent' or 'make a little change,' because they tend to avoid a strong negative reaction from student teachers who are predominantly from a majority background. This difference may have origins in something other than Japan's perceived culture of conformity. We argue that it is also a product of differences in recognitional and representational justice in educational policy. For instance, the Norwegian curriculum stipulates that schools and teachers should consider diversity as a resource for learning. In contrast, there is little reference to diversity in the Japanese curriculum. It is mentioned very briefly in the section on children with special needs, which implies children with diverse backgrounds or ethnic and cultural differences fall into this category. Therefore, it depends on the individual instructor whether to bring a justice-oriented perspective into their teaching to prepare student teachers for a classroom with diverse children. In addition, we argue that the employment policy of government-funded schools may have discouraged students of immigrant backgrounds from pursuing a teaching profession. Promotion of non-Japanese nationals is limited in many civil servant positions, including teachers and a number of people with immigrant backgrounds do not choose naturalisation because Japan does not allow dual citizenship. Consequently, there is a significant underrepresentation of ethnic minority teachers and this results in a lack of role models for minority children in schools.

Concluding remarks

Findings from interviews of teacher educators in Japan and Norway provide different approaches in preparing justice-oriented teachers. These differences are not only created because of individual instructors' preferences or different cultural contexts but are also derived from an absence of justice at institutional

levels, particularly in terms of recognition and representation. Therefore, we argue that both the promotion of individual awareness of justice and also the correction of institutional injustices in educational policies are vital to prepare student teachers to be justice-oriented teachers.

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